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ABSTRACT

People from African countries who visit the United States often are stunned by how little people know about African countries. Africa is a large continent more than 3 times the size of the continental United States, and it contains over 50 independent countries. One out of every three member states in the United Nations is an African country. One out of every 10 people in the world lives on the African continent. Increasingly, the United States has economic, political, and organizational ties to African countries. This ERIC Resource Guide provides suggestions and resources for teaching and learning about Africa. The lesson strategies cover confronting African myths and stereotypes; avoiding faulty generalizations; presenting a balanced view; limiting the scope of African study; and avoiding outdated materials. Methods for integrating the study of Africa into elementary and secondary school curricula through the disciplines of social studies (extends to United States history, sociology, and economics), language arts, French, art, music, science, and mathematics are noted. Resources for teaching about Africa include: Internet, bibliographies, museums, Peace Corps, guest speakers, embassies, teachers' travel experiences and "National Resource Centers" (organizations, designated by the U.S. Department of Education, offering a wide range of assistance and materials for teachers and students). Contains 31 references including 19 ERIC resources. (CB)

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Resource Guide

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A Resource Guide to Teaching about Africa

by Susan E. Hume

Why Teach about Africa?

People from African countries who visit the United States often are stunned by how little Americans know about African countries. Africa is a large continent more than three times the size of the continental United States, and it contains over fifty independent countries. One out of every three member states in the United Nations is an African country. One out of every ten people in the world lives on the African continent. Increasingly, the United States has trading and corporate ties to African countries. Thousands of Americans currently work in Africa for corporations and non-governmental organizations, and in the United States Foreign Service and Peace Corps. Now, more than ever, our students need a basic understanding of Africa.

Suggestions for Teaching about Africa.

Confront myths and stereotypes. It seems that no other part of the world conjures up so many myths in the minds of Americans as Africa. A good way to begin a study of the continent is to identify and dispel some of the myths and stereotypes commonly held by Americans. To aid in the discussion, it is useful to compare these American misconceptions of Africa with the myths and stereotypes people in African countries have about the United States. For instance, many Americans believe that all Africans are poor, while many Africans think that all Americans are rich. Americans commonly perceive Africa as a violent, dangerous place. People in African countries often believe the same thing about America. To assist in the discussion of this topic, LESSONS FROM AFRICA (Merryfield 1989) includes a lesson entitled "Stereotypes Kenyan and Liberian Youth Have about Americans."

Avoid faulty generalizations. The African continent has many different climatic zones and landscape features that vary from deserts and savannas to tropical rainforests and snow-capped mountains. It is home to people of every size, shape, and skin color with hundreds of distinctive languages and cultures. The characteristics of neighboring countries can be very different. Teachers must be very careful not to take a single example and present it as the norm for all of Africa. Similarly, teachers must avoid comparing the continent of Africa to the countries of other world regions. It does not make sense, for instance, to compare the African continent to Brazil or China.

Present a balanced view. Most of the attention that Africa receives in the American media is negative. It is easy to dwell on the negative when teaching about Africa. Teachers should not deny the existence of problems in African countries, such as poverty, disease, famine, and war. Rather, students should be encouraged to go beyond the headlines and explore the root causes of these problems. They also should learn about the wide variety of complex cultures that diverse African peoples have created. To focus only on Africa's problems is a disservice to its people and our students.

Teachers should also consider the ways in which Africa is presented in their classrooms compared to other world regions. For example, a teacher whose class focuses on Africa's wildlife should consider whether similar emphasis is placed on wildlife in the study of Europe, Asia, or North America.

Limit the scope of study. Due to its enormous size and diversity, it is impossible to teach all of Africa in a unit or semester of study. Depending on the time available, a class might focus on a single country or choose a country from each region for an expanded study. Nigeria is often a popular choice of study because of the extraordinary cultural and physical diversity within the country. Similarly, Cameroon has been referred to as "Africa in miniature." A teacher may choose to select a country of focus based on available resources or because of a connection to the local community.

Avoid outdated materials. Life in Africa is not static. As in other parts of the world, African societies are constantly changing, more rapidly now than ever before. Teachers need to seek out the most current information and resources available when teaching about the continent.

Africa's Place in the Curriculum.

With a little creativity and flexibility, the study of Africa can be woven into almost any part of the elementary and secondary school curriculum.

Social studies. The study of Africa is usually associated with world history and geography courses. Yet, Africa can be integrated into many of the other social studies as well. For instance, in an American history class, students may examine how the Cold War shaped United States foreign policy toward Africa. In their study of sociology, students can see how the roles of women are changing in many African societies or how urbanization in Africa is affecting family relationships. Economics students might consider how exchange rates and changes in world market prices affect the internal economies of African countries and influence their relationships with other nations.

Language arts. Young students enjoy reading African folktales. They often discover plots and morals parallel to those found in European folktales. One activity for students is to pick out the human qualities given to certain animals such as the spider, hare, and hyena and compare these with folk characters from other parts of the world. By reading African folktales, students gain insight into the attributes most valued by African societies, such as cleverness, wisdom, and bravery. Many anthologies of African folktales are now available.

A wealth of literature by contemporary African writers can meet the interests of high school students. Teachers may choose to sample a specific genre from several countries, focus on the literature of a single country, or concentrate on the writings of one author. A novel, THINGS FALL APART, by Nigerian author Chinua Achebe has become a favorite in many English departments. Literature by African writers is increasingly available in bookstores and libraries.

Journalism students can delve into a fascinating study of the American media's coverage of the African continent. They might explore the types of stories covered, the countries most often covered, the sources of reporters' information, and where American reporters are based on the continent.

French language classes. More French speakers live in African countries than in France. Yet, most French language textbooks devote very little attention to these countries. Lessons on Francophone Africa give students the opportunity to see the ways in which French language and culture have influenced these countries, as well as how the countries

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have retained their unique characteristics. African-American students also may find new relevancy in the language. LA DIVERSITE EN AFRIQUE FRANCOPHONE (Dern 1991) is one of several curriculum guides that have been developed to supplement French language textbooks.

Art. Textiles, jewelry, woodcarvings, metal work, pottery, and stone sculpture are some of the common types of art found in various African countries. Many art museums in the United States have at least modest collections of African art and curators willing to share information with students and teachers. Washington, DC is home to the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African Art. For information about tours and the loan program, teachers can contact the museum's Department of Education on weekdays at (202) 357-4860. If the objective is to create the art rather than just appreciate it, teachers can help students to create African textile designs such as tie-dye, wax-resist, brush batik, and stencil resist. The directions for each of these are included in a curriculum guide, DAILY LIFE IN AFRICA: VARIETY IN AFRICAN DRESS (Leoni and Yoder 1982).

Music. American students enjoy listening to music from Africa. Both traditional and popular music vary tremendously from one country to another. As all kinds of international music become more popular, African music is readily available in local music stores. Also, many public radio stations across the United States carry a weekly program entitled AFROPOP WORLDWIDE, which features the music of Africa and the African diaspora. Students are fascinated by the wide variety of musical instruments played in Africa. Americans usually associate percussion instruments with Africa, but stringed instruments are very common, too. Teachers can combine music and art to help their students create and play simple versions of some musical instruments. Directions are contained in a curriculum guide, DAILY LIFE IN AFRICA: CELEBRATIONS OF AFRICAN LIFE (Leoni and Yoder 1982).

Science and math. Many science teachers incorporate Africa into the curriculum when they teach about the world's tropical rainforests. Other environmental topics related to Africa can be included in the science curriculum. For instance, high school students might examine the success and failures of wildlife conservation strategies implemented by various African governments. Younger students can explore how people in African countries recycle and re-use things. The children's book GALIMOTO (Williams 1990) tells the story of a Malawian boy who searches for scrap metal to build a toy car.

African cultures can also be a part of the math curriculum. Claudia Zaslavsky has traveled the world in her study of numerical systems. She has written many articles and books about the ways in which the study of culture can be integrated into the math curriculum. MULTICULTURAL MATHEMATICS (Zaslavsky 1993) is a book of 58 math activities from around the world.

Resources for Teaching about Africa.

Internet resources. The amount of information about Africa on the Internet is growing rapidly. Internet resources include basic statistics, maps, photographs, travel information, recipes, and addresses for sources of further information. Searching by country name is a good way to begin. Even though new information is continuously being added to the Internet, a helpful introduction is the 1994 K-12 ELECTRONIC GUIDE FOR AFRICAN RESOURCES ON THE INTERNET (Dinar).

Bibliographies. To find appropriate reading materials for students, at least two very helpful bibliographies are available. OUR FAMILY, OUR FRIENDS, OUR WORLD (Miller-Lachmann 1992) contains a chapter of bibliographic entries devoted to Africa. AFROPHILE: RECOMMENDED TITLES ON AFRICA FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE (Randolph 1994) lists over 450 titles by interest level. In both books, all of the titles listed have received positive reviews from African scholars and educators. AFROPHILE may be ordered for $15.00 plus $2.00 shipping and handling from Africa Access, 2204 Quinton Road, Silver Spring, MD 20910; telephone number (301) 587-5686.

Museums. Art museums, children's museums, and natural history museums often feature permanent or special exhibits related to Africa. These institutions usually offer special tours for school groups and educational materials to accompany the exhibits. Many museums maintain lending collections of books, audio-visual materials, and artifact kits. Some also host Africa-related guest lectures, artistic performances, and film series.

Peace Corps. World Wise Schools was created in 1989 to help educate American children about the countries the Peace Corps serves. The organization links American students in grades 3-12 with Peace Corps volunteers serving in countries around the world. Students and volunteers can exchange letters, pictures, audio cassettes, and small artifacts. Teachers may also contact the World Wise Schools office for the names of returned Peace Corps volunteers living in or near their community. Many returned volunteers are eager to visit classrooms and share their overseas experiences. Finally, World Wise Schools produces country-specific educational videos and study guides. The current collection on African countries includes Senegal, Lesotho, and Cameroon. For further information contact Peace Corps, World Wise Schools, 1990 K Street, Suite 9500, Washington, DC 20526; telephone number (800) 424-8580, ext. 2283.

Guest speakers. Even colleges and universities of modest size often have students and faculty from African countries, as well as Americans who have traveled, studied, and worked in Africa. If no African studies program exists on campus, potential speakers may be found by calling a university's international studies program or international student services office. When a guest speaker is invited into the classroom, it is important to remind students that this is an individual and not the quintessential representative of a particular country. Each speaker comes with a different set of experiences and attitudes.

Embassies. Almost every African country maintains an embassy in the United States. By writing to an embassy, students can acquire basic information about a country, in addition to promotional items such as travel brochures. Addresses of embassies may be found in the reference section of libraries or on the Internet.

Teachers' travel experiences. Each summer, a select group of teachers go to Africa through the Fulbright-Hays Seminars Abroad Program. The participants spend five or six weeks traveling and studying in one or more African countries. Many of the curriculum units they develop upon returning home are available to all teachers. Titles include HISTORY AND CULTURE OF TANZANIA AND ZAMBIA, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA, and EGYPT: TRANSITION TO THE MODERN WORLD.

National Resource Centers.

The organizations listed below provide information and materials for teaching and learning about Africa. These Title VI National Resource Centers, designated by the U.S. Department of Education, offer a wide range of assistance for teachers and students. Although services vary among centers, they include lending curriculum guides and audio-visual materials, hosting workshops and summer institutes, providing guest speakers, and publishing newsletters for teachers.

Boston University
African Studies Center
270 Bay State Road
Boston, MA 02215
(617) 353-3673

University of California - Berkeley
African Studies Center
356 Stevens Hall
Berkeley, CA 94720
(510) 642-8338

University of California - Los Angeles
African Studies Center
10244 Bunche Hall, 405 Hilgard Ave
Los Angles, CA 90024
(213) 825-3070

Central State University
African Studies Program
Wilberforce, OH 45384
(513) 376-6264

Columbia University
Institute of African Studies
1103 International Affairs Bldg.
420 W. 118th Street
New York, NY 10027
(212) 854-4633

University of Florida
Center for African Studies
427 Grinter Hall
Gainsville, Florida 32611
(904) 392-2187

Howard University
African Studies Program
Box 231
Washington, DC 20059
(202) 806-7115

University of Illinois
Center for African Studies
210 International Studies Bldg.
910 S. Fifth Street
Champaign, IL 61820
(217) 333-6335

Indiana University
African Studies Program
Woodburn Hall 221
Bloomington, IN 47405
(812) 855-6825

University of Kansas
African Studies Center
Lawrence, KS 66045
(913) 804-3054

Lincoln University
African Studies Program
Lincoln University, PA 19352
(215) 932-8300

Michigan State University
African Studies Center
100 Center for International Programs
East Lansing, MI 48824
(517) 353-1700

University of Pennsylvania
African Studies Program
Room 418, University Museum
33rd & Spruce Streets
Philadelphia, PA 19104-6398
(215) 898-6971

Stanford University
Center for African Studies
114 Littlefield Hall
300 Lausen Street
Stanford, CA 94305-5013
(415) 642-8338

University of Wisconsin
African Studies Program
1454 Van Hise
1220 Linden Dr.
Madison, WI 53706-1557
(608) 262-2380

References and ERIC Resources. The following list includes references used to prepare this Digest. The items followed by an ED number are available in microfiche and/or paper copies from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). For information about prices, contact EDRS, 7420 Fullerton Road, Suite 110, Springfield, Virginia, 22153-2852; telephone numbers are (703) 440-1400 and (800) 443-3742. Entries followed by an EJ number, announced monthly in the CURRENT INDEX TO JOURNALS IN EDUCATION (CIJE), are not available through EDRS. However, they can be located in the journal section of most larger libraries by using the bibliographic information provided, requested through Interlibrary Loan, or ordered from the UMI reprint service.

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